

RESPONSIBILITY AND EDUCATION

"A study of the meaning and application of the term 'responsibility' in educational discourse with particular reference to its bearing on educational administration and management".

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ABSTRACT

The major objective of this dissertation is to survey and comment upon the usages of the term 'responsibility' in education with particular reference to the bearing of such usage on educational administration. It is a commonly held view that the concept of responsibility is closely linked with the concept of education and that it has application within the enterprises that we label 'educational'. With this view in mind we tend to agree that educators should accept a heavy responsibility burden and in order to do this it is necessary for them to be very responsible people. Many educational theorists would also hold that to be regarded as responsible would be a positive and perhaps necessary attribute of the 'educated man'.

The term 'responsibility' can have a variety of meanings and it seems that a lack of clarification or specification in this regard can lead and has led to a degree of practical and conceptual difficulty for those involved in educational decision making. It appears that the term is used not only too freely and in a loose and inconsistent manner but also that such usage has tended to obscure certain value-laden aspects of the concept of education. Abstractions such as those closely related to the usage of terms like 'responsibility', 'education', and 'society' are complex and fraught with conceptual difficulty. In an attempt to overcome the problems derived from such difficulty it will be necessary to make some general assumptions in relation to what is meant and what is desired. Particular efforts will be made to emphasize areas where inconsistency, avoidable ambiguity, combined with disregard for logical argument have proved detrimental to the quality of education taking place. It is intended to briefly survey a number of issues and to deal more fully with those which appear to have specific significance and application to educational practices in the local situation.

(ii)

In the course work leading up to this dissertation, I was concerned at the apparent lack of liaison between the philosophical and the administrative aspects of our education system. There are a number of reasons for this, not the least being the difficulties of combining particular disciplines or areas of knowledge and enquiry in such a way as to make them more widely available and acceptable to educators in general. Those involved in administration often find that the continuing demands of the on-going task do not allow them time to involve themselves in philosophical considerations which could, on more careful analysis, be regarded as vital to the success of the schooling and educational enterprises for which they are responsible.

The study has been undertaken with the practicalities of educational administration and management specifically in mind and some efforts have been made to curtail involvement in complex theoretical debate. To do this it has been necessary to bring together philosophical and practical issues in a discursive and meaningful manner.

Some of the stipulations made in relation to the term 'education' will reflect my own views, and it is my main intention to aid, where possible, the understanding of those administrators or managers who are familiar with the local situation. Any attempts to put forward radical innovative educational theories, or even to discuss alternative theories in detail, would tend to detract from the aim of the exercise which is to reveal the central importance of the concept of responsibility in the current management of education.

(iii)

#### PREFACE

In the introductory section, I will discuss the various senses in which the term 'responsibility' is used, concentrating more particularly on those issues which appear to relate directly to education. Stress will be placed on the moral aspects of the concept. In order to do this, it will be necessary to make some comment upon the concept of education and the nature of knowledge.

As it is widely accepted that it is necessary to be responsible to some person, group, or, by implication, institution, the second section will attempt to examine and evaluate some of the claims, demands or inferences made in this regard. Some of these are clear while others are vague, ambiguous, and inconsistent. Some raise questions of philosophical awareness while others relate more specifically to the practicalities of teaching in a school. Because of my particular interest in the management aspects greater emphasis will be placed on the latter. This will entail commenting upon responsibilities the educator might have towards the community, the school, the parents, and the students he is employed to teach. Special reference will be made to the more complex situation of the school principal.

Section III deals with the particular task for which the teacher is held responsible. It raises questions such as the degree to which professional freedom should be limited by stipulation of task by some authority. Reference will be made to curriculum development and to accountability in education.

SECTION I

1.

a) Some difficulties with the meaning of the term 'responsibility'.

The term 'responsibility' is frequently used in educational discourse. Teaching is looked upon as being a very 'responsible' profession and it is commonly accepted that teachers must be 'responsible' people. It is also widely accepted that education itself improves individuals in such a way that they may become more 'responsible' people. In another sense those involved in the teaching profession are held 'responsible' for carrying out specified tasks in specific ways. They also find themselves 'responsible' to certain people and institutions as well as finding certain people and institutions 'responsible' to them.

This study will attempt to analyse, clarify and make some value judgment on the usage of the term 'responsibility' as it is applied in education and matters relating to the task of the educator. If it can be assumed that there is a value-laden, internally consistent concept of responsibility linked with or necessary to the concept of education it is important to see how such usage relates to, and is consistent with such a link.

There would appear to be two interrelated tasks involved here. One would be to clarify and determine which aspects of responsibility seem to be of value and perhaps necessary to an acceptable notion of education while the other would be to make some examination and evaluation of the application and usage of the term 'responsibility' as it occurs in our educational system. The usages I will refer to will be drawn largely from my own experience of Tasmanian educational practices although I am assuming that such usages have a much wider reference.

Clarification of concepts of this nature is complex since as Peters points out, simple definition or formulation of criteria

is not always appropriate or possible. He draws upon Wittgenstein's comments in Philosophical Investigations (1953) when he says that

the uses of a word are not always related by falling under a definition as in geometry, where definitions are provided for terms such as 'triangle'. Rather they often form a family united by a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing; sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail.<sup>1</sup>

Whether the various usages of the term 'responsibility' in education refer to a single concept is questionable. Similarities of meaning can be found but such similarities might not in themselves be enough to allow such a classification to be made. The difficulties which arise at this conceptual level seem to underly many of the practical problems I will refer to throughout this paper. Given that we accept that education is a value-laden concept it is important that some distinction be made between those responsibilities which have strong moral implications and those which do not. It is my contention that ambiguous, vague, or careless usage of the term has a negative effect upon the value aspects of education and educational practice.

I will begin by discussing the commonly held view that teachers should or must be responsible people. Some teachers are not particularly responsible and yet they are still regarded as teachers. The question is whether or not they must be responsible in order to be regarded as worthy of the 'professional educator' title. Is it a necessary characteristic or merely something thought to be valuable for teachers to have?

<sup>1</sup>Peters, R.S. Ethics and Education, London, Unwin, 1966, p. 23



3.

It is perhaps important here to note that throughout this paper there will be inevitable difficulties in distinguishing between the characteristics and behaviour of the teacher or educator as he exists or has existed in society and those characteristics which are deemed as necessary or desirable for him to have.

If it is agreed that the professional educator is a person who, by definition, must carry a heavy burden of responsibility, what are the various senses of the notion being referred to? The most obvious aspect relates to the fact that the person in question can be trusted and expected to act in a morally acceptable manner. The fact that all mature human beings are expected to act in this way brings up the question as to whether greater demands in this moral sense are placed on the educator.

There seems to be some confusion over the character traits deemed to be necessary for the teacher, as teacher, to have and the specific nature of the tasks which relate to the obligations of the profession. For instance, does the teacher need to have that quality of character which carries with it all of the virtuous dispositions deemed as desirable by society or as the Funk and Wagnall (1961) describes it,

the status of personality considered as capable of responding to the obligations established by moral law, or by ethical principles and ideals however derived.<sup>1</sup>

No doubt this is desirable but perhaps too general to be of practical help and, again, is it any more necessary in the field of education than in any other occupation.

What are the moral implications if one is to be regarded as a 'responsible person'?

<sup>1</sup>Funk and Wagnalls, New Standard Dictionary, New York, Funk and Wagnall Co., 1961, p. 2095.

Man is regarded as being responsible as long as there are no extenuating circumstances to relieve him of this state. He may be regarded as not responsible for his actions if his mental capacity is insufficient to understand and perceive the distinctions of right and wrong.<sup>1</sup>

If mature adults can be regarded as responsible people, then the teacher should fit into this category. There are, however, frequent claims made which would suggest that there is a degree of teacher responsibility which requires the teacher to be a person of outstanding moral character. Does this particular profession in fact demand such a special character specification? Could it not be argued that a skilled teacher, fully aware of his influences, might only be expected to act in a specified moral way when he is fulfilling educational tasks? If a teacher is not aware of the full impact of his influences on his students it could be argued that outstanding moral traits of character are necessary. On the other hand if the teacher does not possess this degree of awareness, it could equally be argued that he does not possess the attributes necessary for him to be regarded as a 'professional educator'.

Considerable controversy surrounds the professional status of teachers. Is teaching a profession and should teachers be regarded as professionals with appropriate professional responsibilities?

When discussing teacher responsibility from a theoretical point of view I will assume that the term 'teacher' refers to a person with professional status. By this I mean a person who has undergone a lengthy period of tertiary education and vocational training, and who has the necessary degree of knowledge, skill and

<sup>1</sup>Funk & Wagnalls, op. cit. p.2095.

commitment to educate others in a morally acceptable manner. Despite the vagueness surrounding the criteria and the fact that many people currently teaching would have difficulty measuring up to any criteria of this nature it could be maintained that the complexity and specialized demands of the task as it is accepted by western society requires practitioners of professional status.

Another important issue to be faced when attempting to clarify the concept of responsibility relates to questions of free-will and determinism. In other words, can man be held responsible for his actions if they are determined by forces over which he has no control? To hold this view would be to destroy both the notions of responsibility and morality as we know them.

Frankena makes the point that it is crucial to hold

that in any society with enough social freedom to have a morality, normal human beings are or at least may be free to do as they choose. .... we must also hold that our having this sort of freedom is sufficient for the purposes of morality.<sup>1</sup>

Peters says that

there is a presumption in favour of men being usually responsible for their actions and the fact that we single out odd cases (e.g. stealing while sleepwalking or by mistake) suggests that we believe in general men can help what they do.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Frankena, W. Ethics, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, 1973, Ch. 4., p. 77

<sup>2</sup> Peters, R.S. Authority, Responsibility and Education, London, Allen and Unwin, 1959, p. 58.

Western society accepts the notion that man should be held responsible for his actions unless there are extenuating circumstances. Extenuating circumstances might vary from country to country or even community to community, but the basic principle remains.

The main problem which arises from our acceptance of such a notion is that of deciding where the distinction between culpability and extenuating circumstances can be drawn. Is the Grade II teacher to be blamed or be charged with irresponsibility if Mary cannot read? Or are there sufficient extenuating circumstances to suggest that the teacher should not be blamed? From an institutional or legal point of view the teacher is being employed to teach Mary to read and she has not succeeded. Surely she is falling down on her professional responsibilities. What happens to the value of this institutional responsibility when it is found that sufficient reasons can be found to suggest that the teacher could not be justly held responsible for Mary's inability? Is our notion of responsibility too idealistic? Is it that we simply feel that someone should be blamed in a case of this nature? Perhaps the problem is caused by the rather ambiguous interchange of meaning between the moral and rational aspects of the concept and those tied to institutional and legal conventions. It seems that there are many situations in teaching where a lack of clarity of purpose enables what we might desire to be labelled as professional responsibilities to be waived in practice. Unfortunately the open-ended nature of the concept of education, we tend to accept, complicates and perhaps conflicts with the responsibility issues tied to our acceptance of education as a profession.

b) Educational responsibility and knowledge

Not only are teachers expected to be morally responsible people but they also have a responsibility to carry out, or are responsible for, certain tasks. If the teacher is to carry out this responsibility he must be clear about the nature of such tasks. If he is to pass on certain knowledge he must be aware not only of the content but of the structure of this knowledge. Unfortunately there is considerable controversy surrounding the nature of the knowledge which is, and/or, should be passed on in schools.

For instance can knowledge be analysed and classified under basic disciplines using universal guidelines or is it derived entirely from socially constructed conventions? The former view as advocated and formulated by the prominent British educator, Paul Hirst, provides an objective base for educators and in general is widely accepted in this country. He maintains that the central objectives of education are development of mind and that most school knowledge should not be limited by specific sub-cultures. From this point of view the educator is provided with a reasonably clear set of objectives or ends even if the methodology required is still open to question, review and development.

Michael F.D. Young<sup>1</sup> questions the whole notion of universal and objective knowledge and is particularly critical of the type of knowledge that is selected and passed on in schools. He sees the present structure and organization of education as seeking to preserve the social and political status quo in an

<sup>1</sup> Lawton, D. Class, Culture and the Curriculum, London, R.K.P., 1975, p.58.

unjust society and makes the point that subject barriers, which he claims are arbitrary and artificial, are one source of this injustice. Strong sociological view points of this nature tend to throw the whole question of what it means to be educated into confusion and leaves the educator with insoluble problems of responsibility. Many of the questions which arise from sociological research must be taken into account but as Lawton<sup>1</sup> points out, investigation in this area must not be allowed to supersede both philosophical and psychological enquiry.

It seems that the educator has a responsibility to pass on the values of society to the next generation but the real question seems to revolve around the definition and selection of values. To pass on values which have not been assessed in the light of more objective universal criteria could in itself be irresponsible. The educator may find that to pass on values which are merely based on a consensus of society views might well be harmful or unjust to individuals. It must be decided whether the teacher is more responsible to the society he serves or to the individuals he teaches. Owing to the vagueness surrounding the concept of society decisions of this nature must have an important bearing on the nature of his moral responsibilities.

c) Responsibility in educational discourse

Some clarification of the concept of education seems necessary. R.S. Peters maintains that education is closely tied to the notion of improving people by increasing their knowledge, awareness, understanding and rationality. Notions such as 'improvement', 'betterment' and that of passing on what is worthwhile

<sup>1</sup>Lawton, D. Class, Culture and the Curriculum, London, R.K.P., 1975, p. 58.

are built into the concept. He claims that the educator must have the ability to seek out through rational means that which is worthwhile. The methods used to pass on such skills and dispositions must be 'morally responsible' and should not include 'indoctrinatory' or 'brainwashing' techniques. Peters' emphasis on knowledge, truth and reason would seem to be commonly acceptable and this in turn would provide the educator with some basic guidelines for his teaching responsibilities.<sup>1</sup>

The teacher has difficulties deciding on the moral implications of what is 'worthwhile' as well as his role in the moral education of the child. Considerable efforts have been made by Peters, and later Hirst, to formulate a set of fundamental moral principles that, although subject to dispute, could provide a basis for a rational morality. Hirst makes the point that 'it has been argued that in certain fundamental principles we have the logically necessary basis for a rational morality. To these the judgments of all men concerned with having reasons for actions must, if they are defensible, conform!'<sup>2</sup>

It could be argued that a teacher capable of basing his moral guidance on such fundamental principles, would be acting in an inconsistent manner if he did not follow these principles himself. This does, in a sense, relate to the moral responsibility demands placed on teachers. Although we might maintain that a teacher must have the ability to, and also must, reason it might still be difficult to require that he must be regarded as a rational and moral person in some total character sense. This requirement is made even more difficult to justify if we lack a clear criteria for judgment of issues in knowledge, learning theory, teaching practice and a generally acceptable set of criteria for value and moral judgments.

<sup>1</sup>Peters, R.S. Ethics and Education, London, Allen and Unwin, 1966.

<sup>2</sup>Hirst, P.H. Moral Education in a Secular Society, London, University of London, 1974, p. 50.

One sense of responsibility frequently used in relation to education is that referring to causation. If the question is asked 'who was responsible for making that noise?' it is possible that we are simply asking who caused the action. Are questions or references of this nature containing the word 'responsible' merely causal or do they imply some type of moral judgment? In other words, is it implied that whoever acted, was right or wrong in doing so? Although this need not be the case, common usage would, I believe, tend to indicate moral implications of this nature.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps much of the confusion associated with the term 'responsibility' relates to the fact that this moral aspect is not made sufficiently clear. Also, if a teacher is said to be responsible for a task, or for a child, it is often difficult to know which particular sense is being used. In some cases it seems to be a rather vague and ambiguous combination of the two. The very seriousness of the moral implications suggests that far more clarification is needed.

Educators are primarily responsible for carrying out the task of educating. To make comment on the strength of the ethical implications of such an obligation it is necessary to investigate more fully the exact nature of the task. The degree of obligation or duty related to this task may be no higher in one sense than any other where a contract of obligation is set up. If individuals involved are numerous and also immature, other senses of the notion enter into the question, as do other moral principles. If the task itself involves moral behaviour and the passing on of moral principles, defining responsibility becomes extremely complex indeed.

<sup>1</sup> Frankena, W. op. cit., p.71-2. Frankena discusses the possibility of praise or blame implications inherent within responsibility statements.



It seems that the open-ended nature of the concept of education can place the teacher in a position where the scope and extent of his responsibilities appear to be unlimited. If, however, certain stipulations or guidelines are agreed upon in relation to the concept of responsibility it is possible that logic and reason could be used to clarify his position in practice.

Aristotle held in effect that an individual is responsible for his act if (i) its cause is internal to him, that is, he is not compelled to act by someone or something external to him, and (ii) his doing it is not a result of any ignorance. While there are problems relating to what can be counted as culpable ignorance, these conditions are necessary for responsibility.<sup>1</sup> It seems clear that such a view is widely accepted and that it is quite reasonable to hold teachers responsible for actions they are both capable of doing and free to do.

If we hold the Aristotelean view it becomes logically impossible for teachers to accept responsibility or be held responsible in areas where they either lack skill and knowledge or are not free to act. In practice however teachers are given and do accept responsibilities when such conditions are not met. Is this particular use of the term inconsistent or does it refer to a different concept? Hart (1968) suggests that whenever a person occupies a distinctive place or office in a social organization, to which specific duties are attached to provide for the welfare of others or to advance in some specific way the aims or purposes of the organisation he is properly said to be responsible for the performance of these duties, or for doing what is necessary to fulfil them.<sup>2</sup> Some of these duties or responsibilities would have legal implications and most would

<sup>1</sup>Aristotle. The Ethics of Aristotle: the Nicomachean Ethics (translated by J.A.K. Thomson) London, Allen and Unwin, 1953, p.61.

<sup>2</sup>Hart, H.L.A. Punishment and Responsibility, London, Oxford Uni. Press, 1968, p. 212.

carry varying degrees of moral obligation. Apart from the obvious problems arising from conflicting obligations between the profession and the institution or organisation the most important question seems to surround the degree of liability the teacher must face for his actions in relation to such duties. If he lacks knowledge and skill is it his fault? Should he have been appointed as a teacher in the first place? If a child is seen to suffer from the 'irresponsible' actions of a teacher it is frequently assumed that someone should be blamed. Various people or groups at various hierarchical levels have legal responsibility but it seems that we are really seeking those with a rational and moral liability. Perhaps the open-ended nature of education itself and the administrative structures that control it within this society make our task almost impossible. Even if we accept that a teacher is professionally able do schools allow him sufficient freedom to take responsibility and the liability implied within it?

Given these conceptual difficulties and limitations teachers in our schools still face strong moral responsibilities. If the teacher is considered to be sufficiently knowledgeable, skilful and has the freedom to select his own curriculum and methodology and we agree that education should benefit individuals and be passed on in a morally acceptable manner the moral demands placed on him become obvious.

Liability for irresponsibility is not always consistent. A teacher might be found to be legally liable when on more rational-moral grounds satisfactory extenuating circumstances might excuse him.<sup>1</sup> This gives rise to the dilemmas surrounding utilitarianism and those moral principles intent on maintaining justice for the individual.

<sup>1</sup>For example teachers find themselves legally responsible for the supervision of children in school grounds at times when the logic of the practical situation makes the obligation questionable.

The teacher finds himself in a position where he must face the conflicts which can exist between individual professional demands and those upheld by the educational institution in which he chooses to practice. Educational administrators and managers also face a serious responsibility in this regard. Unfortunately in practice circular arguments frequently occur. The administrator is often unwilling to grant sufficient professional status to the teacher whereas the teacher maintains that he is not given sufficient freedom to take full professional status and the responsibilities which go with it.

Who is to blame and who is to judge? Is it the individual teacher, the training institution, the employing body, the government or do we obscure the issue by suggesting that society be held responsible? As mentioned previously the notion of society is in itself somewhat vague and ambiguous and the degree to which one can apportion moral responsibility in this direction could be questioned. As far as moral liability is concerned it seems that as soon as one shifts from the individual to corporate groups or institutions the concept weakens. Can an institution be given moral rational responsibility in the same sense that an individual can? I will elaborate on this point at a later stage because it seems to have considerable bearing on the responsibility problems facing the teacher.

## SECTION II

- a) A consideration of some general claims made in relation to the educator's responsibilities

Teachers are responsible in varying degrees to people and, by implication, to institutions. To be held responsible to someone implies that it is to them one is answerable. This means that it is they who have the right to blame or punish if particular tasks or obligations are not carried out or adhered to in a satisfactory manner. Man as a society member is expected to be morally responsible to others. Without becoming involved in an ethical debate we will assume that within our society the principles underlying this moral responsibility have an acceptable rational basis. For the purpose of this study I have referred to this particular notion as rational - moral responsibility. As a member of a profession and as a member of an institution developed for the purposes of practising that profession the teacher's responsibilities become more specialized. Many of the responsibilities relate to the structure and rules of the institution. The teacher has a series of legal and institutional responsibilities which have not necessarily developed from any rational - moral base. Although there appears to be a degree of overlap of these two aspects of responsibility they should not be confused.

Before a teacher can be held responsible to anybody, group or institution it is necessary to establish what he is responsible for. It seems quite unreasonable to suggest that he be held responsible to someone for his actions if no clear criteria has been established and found acceptable. A situation should not occur where a school principal or a parent assumes a position in relation to those responsible to him which is not closely bound by the principles which

initially set up the responsibility link in the first place. As I have stressed previously a lack of clarity surrounding the concept of education itself can lead to a situation where a teacher feels bound by responsibilities to others but neither party is really clear about the specifics of the obligation. At worst this can lead to a situation where the teacher is left vulnerable to the subjective whims and desires of those he is responsible to.

In practice, who are teachers responsible to and to what degree can this responsibility be justified? How valid are claims that they should be responsible to themselves, mankind, God, society, the community, the school, the principal, the parents, and the students? The lack of conceptual clarity surrounding some of these areas makes the task of analysing implied responsibility links a laborious and possibly futile exercise. It appears that many claims are made and accepted in ignorance of the philosophical issues they raise. Many are in fact cliches. For instance, is a teacher responsible to himself? Is anyone? Does this merely mean that it is advisable for a teacher to have a degree of confidence in his own abilities or does it raise the question of self-duty? Whether one has a moral duty to oneself is far too complex to debate here but to some extent it could be argued that if we agree that there are basic moral principles that apply to everyone then self should be included. From another viewpoint, however, one must question whether one has any moral duties when other people are in no way involved. The educator educating himself might have a professional duty to himself but the moral obligation in a direct sense is questionable. A teacher might also be obliged to benefit himself by continuous self-education so that he might maintain his professional skills and abilities which in turn enables him to continue to benefit

others. It is doubtful, however, whether this could be regarded as actual duty to self. A more difficult notion is that of being answerable to oneself. Perhaps an educator's responsibility to his profession does involve a degree of self assessment and in a sense self answerability but at this stage it seems that little of a positive nature will be gained here by pursuing the question further.

If teachers must be responsible people and by implication be responsible to their students, is it possible to extend this responsibility to the general notion of mankind? If the concept of education being embraced is based on a socially constructed view of knowledge the emphasis and direction of the educator's responsibility would, by implication, be aimed more towards that particular social group or sub-culture. On the other hand a more universal objectivist view suggests obligations on a broader scale.

Perhaps one way of viewing such a general claim is to relate its value to the individual educator. To be told that as an educator one is or must be responsible to mankind, is in one sense merely suggesting that by definition education does benefit mankind. In a very practical sense I find it difficult to envisage how the educator might assess his contribution to mankind or in fact how mankind might reprimand or punish him if he was falling down on his job.

Within this responsibility debate claims related to God and religious institutions again seem to depend closely on the view of knowledge being accepted. In 1944, Britain legislated for religious instruction and daily collective worship in maintained schools. Today there seems to be an increasing desire to divorce moral education from religious education. If education is to be based on truth and reason it could be argued that obligations to God become debatable. Hirst says

at present, we are, I think, uncertain not only about the truth of religious claims, but about the kind of meaning they have. It is thus an open-endedness about the character of their meaning as much as about their truth that religious education needs to reflect. At its heart religious education is concerned with different claims to both kinds of meaning and truth. It is not concerned simply with one kind of meaning but many conflicting beliefs of that kind amongst which we are unable to say objectively which are true.<sup>1</sup>

When the educator faces claims of responsibility related to religious beliefs he must decide upon the exact nature of the claim. If it merely relates to the basic moral principles which he can objectively justify by calling upon sufficient publicly acceptable reasons then the obligation is justified regardless of the initial religious source. If the educator involved accepts such a proposal there would appear to be no substantial reason why there should be any educational responsibility to God or religious institution.

As stated previously, many claims of responsibility are made at a rather superficial level. In the case of reference to God the claims often refer to the belief that God represents that which is 'good' and 'right' for a particular society and we should educate with that which is 'good' and 'right' as our main objective. Yet religious beliefs are often personal and obviously vary in importance from group to group. It is impossible to comment upon their value to individual educators but it is possible to show some inconsistencies when they are related to an educational concept based upon publicly acceptable sources of knowledge and criteria for truth.

If we regard the society as the institution which commonly initiates and takes responsibility for educational organization, then those teachers working for that society would have specific obligations to it. The teacher has both a moral responsibility to fulfil any contractual arrangement he might enter as well as those

<sup>1</sup>Hirst, P.H. Knowledge and the Curriculum, London, R.K.P. 1974, p.187



responsibilities which are derived from the organizational structure and rules of the institution. However it is the society which must take responsibility for the basic philosophy of its educational pursuits and on the type of knowledge, skills and attributes its educators must have. Unfortunately, the methods by which decisions are made in relation to this philosophy and to those attributes deemed necessary to carry it out are frequently far from clear. The view that education is a normative concept would seem to be widely accepted but there still seems to be considerable confusion over the actual responsibilities related to norms, curriculum, and methodology.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, if the normative concept is denied then the whole responsibility debate becomes a virtually insoluble conceptual maze.

It seems that teachers within our society see their main task as being directed towards the students they teach. In a society of this nature it would be openly agreed by those involved in the organization of both state and privately maintained educational institutions that the child or person being educated ought to be the prime beneficiary of the system. However, the degree to which teachers are aware of the actual source of, or bias of, the knowledge and attitudes they pass on is very relevant to the question. If society agrees with the fact that logic and reason should prevail and that conditioning and brain-washing practices are unacceptable then it has the responsibility to make sure that its educators are thoroughly skilled in disciplines which will enable them to gain a full awareness of influences running contrary to these basic principles.

<sup>1</sup>Peters, R.S. Concept of Education, London, Oxford Uni. Press, 1973.

Another way of looking at this question is to maintain that the professional educator is the person responsible for organizing and passing on that which the 'society' deems valuable. How does the 'society' decide exactly what this is?<sup>1</sup> Are the politicians who are given the institutional or legal responsibility to initiate and maintain education qualified to make decisions of this nature? It would seem that the only action open to a government which accepts a responsibility in the moral and rational sense is to pass it on to those most qualified to do so. It is at this stage that the real question of the moral responsibility of teachers becomes a vital issue. If they are the ones with the ability to ask the relevant questions and to formulate satisfactory answers, they are also the ones who must ultimately assess the worth of their efforts. It could be argued that they can and must be held accountable for their actions but surely it is they who must, through their own expertise, decide upon the criteria for such accountability. If the public or its governmental representatives do not accept such criteria, then would it not be either denying the fact that educators have professional expertise or denying them the freedom needed to carry any degree of professional responsibility. It is difficult to escape the consideration that in order to give society what it implies it wants with regard to education, knowledge of and knowledge gained through such disciplines as philosophy, psychology and sociology is necessary. Those community members denied access to such knowledge must rely on the fact that the educator is or should be a 'responsible' person. It is mainly for this reason one could maintain that the educator is responsible to the 'society'.

<sup>1</sup>One could ask the question as to whether a society can actually decide. Is this whole notion merely an extended metaphor?

In practice, the problem is far more complex. If 'society' places full trust in its academics how does it know whether they are capable in the moral sense of accepting such responsibilities? It is not surprising that sociologists such as Young express doubts about the selection and source of school knowledge. On the other hand if the professional group is not given the degree of trust or freedom deemed as necessary to carry out their tasks, surely their responsibility to 'society' is limited accordingly.

- b) A consideration of educational responsibility to the community, to the educational institution, to the school principal, to the parent, and to the student.

The teacher often finds himself in a situation where he must face the considerable gap which can develop between the more general objectivist views of education on which his education and training have been based and the particular views and needs of a specific community. For instance many young teachers tend to reject various traditional community practices and customs on the grounds that they are based on questionable knowledge sources and logic. Each community may have differing needs and ways of valuing but these need not conflict with the general ends which relate to notions such as the 'development of the mind' and those relating to the 'educated man'. Pedagogical practices and related methodology might need to vary considerably from community to community, but principles related to access to certain concepts and areas of knowledge need not. It must be assumed that the teacher has the ability to choose between conflicting local demands and those laid down by his professional knowledge.

For example, the conflict may occur when parents are demanding very specific vocational training at the expense of areas which are considered to be more basic to the 'development of mind'.

The teacher seems to have a responsibility to inform the parents of the reasons for certain preferences but what is often extremely difficult is knowing how far in this direction he should go. Is the teacher expected to merely teach in the classroom or is it his responsibility to attempt to change the community, its attitudes and its values? D.W. Wringe says that teachers

are not clear about how far they ought to go in diagnosing attitudes which are hostile to education, as they see it, and in prompting attitudes which make their task as educators easier. In other words, is it reasonable, some teachers are asking, to visit pupils' homes, or even teach pupils' parents in order to make pupils more receptive.<sup>1</sup>

He goes on to ask who would carry out the teacher's normal function of teaching if teachers themselves moved over to perform a rather different kind of social service.<sup>2</sup> If teachers did decide that they must fully abide by community decisions in relations to curriculum and methodology how would such decisions be made? Who would decide when conflicts between members of the community arose? The difficulties involved in such decision making would leave the teacher in a situation where his responsibilities could never properly be defined and any specific criteria for teacher preparation could not be established. In practice universal notions such as 'the educated man' and the 'development of the mind' are generally accepted as basic objectives. The teachers task is to accomodate local community desires in as far as they do not detract from these basic objectives. Unfortunately an over enthusiasm to innovate has led some administrators and teachers to diverge from this path thereby increasing the degree of conflict and difficulty surrounding their

<sup>1</sup> Wringe, D.W. "The Teacher's Task", in D. Lloyd (ed.), Philosophy and the Teacher, London, R.K.P., 1976, p.10.

<sup>2</sup> ibid, p.12.

responsibilities.<sup>1</sup>

Another aspect for consideration relates to the nature of the responsibility the community has towards the teacher. There is an obligation which community members have towards the teacher. There is an obligation which community members have towards utilities and institutions set up for their mutual benefit, even though many today might repudiate this. If the community believes that its schools are institutions set up to benefit its younger generations then it would only be reasonable for the teacher to expect support and co-operation in this direction. In practice many community members referring back to their own school experience might be hard to convince that such institutions were set up to benefit them. Many saw school as a strict authoritarian institution where the relevance of many aspects of the curriculum was to them questionable. To be told that French verbs and algebra 'broadened the mind' was not convincing. Today we find many schools aware of such criticisms and discontent and are moving to the other extreme. In an attempt change the image and to gain greater community support new and interesting subjects have been added to the curriculum and schools have opened their doors for community advice and help. Co-operation of this nature is valuable but has led to other responsibility problems. To what degree should the lay community members be encouraged to make educational decisions? To what degree can the teacher take professional responsibility for the education taking place if he becomes subordinate to the ad-hoc desires of influential community members. Hirst and Peters take a rather

<sup>1</sup> I have observed situations in at least two local high schools during 1976 where the enthusiasm developed by teachers over community-based projects has led to a situation where the initial educational objectives underlying the projects have been forgotten. The projects themselves seem to have become their own educational objectives. This has led to confusion amongst teachers in relation to their objectives and obligations by stressing the values of searching for educational objectives after and not before the 'educational event' takes place.

strong view on this matter by pointing out that

criticism and consultation are one thing; ultimate responsibility for decisions is quite another. Once academics give up their ultimate right to determine the content of what is to be taught they will in turn become hired lackeys of the community, not authorities on its stock of knowledge. Their own freedom and thoroughness in the transmission of knowledge will be in jeopardy.<sup>1</sup>

It is perhaps easy for the educator to accuse the community of not fulfilling its responsibility tasks but again the degree to which it can be reasonably expected to do this is not clear. The nature of the task gives the teacher the unenviable job of not only educating children but attempting to justify to the general public the grounds for, or the values inherent in, various pedagogical practices, the selection of knowledge and skills, as well as the basic objectives which might underly them. The medical practitioner, for example, does not seem to have problems of the same magnitude. His main task in relation to the remediation of specific instances of ill-health is relatively easy to assess and although his methods might be complex they are generally acceptable and observable. The educator's task is vague and open-ended by comparison. Notions such as 'development of mind' and 'the educated man' are not clear or understood nor are some of the methods teachers use. Even the end-of-year examination, once a positive guide to achievement, is being phased out in many schools to provide for more objective and educationally relevant assessment procedures; more relevant in relation to the task, but more complex in relation to the ease of communication to the general public. Although the communication question is vital, the educator must be careful to respect the nature of his task and not allow public opinion to distort or diminish its value. There is

<sup>1</sup>Hirst, P.H. and Peters, R.S. Logic of Education, London, R.K.P., 1970, p. 120.

no doubt that the community would be horrified to find a surgeon being advised and directed by a group of conscientious laymen while carrying out a delicate brain operation. It is vital that the educator and his task be respected accordingly. As methods and approaches undergo change, the teacher must be prepared to face this communication problem without straying too far from his initial educational obligations. Community participation can be valuable and co-operation should be encouraged, but any attempts to pass responsibilities to those lacking the expertise to handle them must be seriously questioned.

The community expects the teacher to be a 'morally responsible' person not only because we might argue that it is necessary to the concept of the 'professional educator' but also because he is in a position where he must relate in a number of ways to the community's younger, immature and most impressionable members.

To be held 'morally' responsible to the community would also carry with it an obligation to be perceptive to the particular moral values of that community. Often local views and values on issues such as sex, marriage and religious belief differ considerably from those of college or university graduates, and it is important that they be dealt with in a tactful and respectful manner. The teacher who is lured into the position of attempting to radically change traditional community attitudes might find that he has not only gone beyond the limits of his educational responsibility, but moved into an area of social welfare, an area in which he is, typically, unqualified.

Often a teacher finds it difficult to know how far his responsibilities extend. If he is educated and trained to a level

which, in practice, earns him 'professional' status there is no guarantee that he is capable of coping with the many and varied demands of not only the community but the society in general. If those concerned with training and those in administrative positions within the schools both believe that there is no real necessity for the teacher to have specific expertise in the areas for which he is given responsibility, it is likely that problems will develop. Even to have expertise in a specific area of knowledge may not be sufficient for the satisfactory passing on of that knowledge to certain age groups. The teacher must be fully aware of the values of such knowledge within the total educational programme, and particularly aware of the cognitive and affective readiness of the individual children involved. Too often it seems teachers are offered, and accept, responsibilities for which they lack such expertise.

For example, it is accepted that teachers should involve themselves in moral education.<sup>1</sup> The community finds this area vitally important and many teachers willingly take on the responsibility. Unfortunately, few teachers have real expertise in, and knowledge of, moral philosophy or pedagogical research and practices which relate to it. They accept the responsibility on the basis that an educator's common sense and general teaching skills are sufficient for him to handle common, everyday tasks relating to behaviour and living with others. If this lack of expertise is acceptable to both administrators and community members the professional status of the teacher must be seriously questioned.

The recent controversy surrounding teaching in the areas of family relationships, alternative lifestyles and morality has shown that the community does expect teachers to have professional

<sup>1</sup> In some cases this expectation is more implied than explicitly stated.



expertise.<sup>1</sup> How teachers are to know exactly what degree of expertise is necessary is difficult to ascertain. Are the teachers to be blamed or does the fault lie with the education department, the school, or perhaps the teacher training institution. Overall institutional responsibility might be with the current government minister but is it possible for him to take rational-moral responsibility. The seriousness with which our society views education suggest that it is not acceptable for the degree of complexity of responsibility problems to be used as an excuse for lack of positive action.

In practice there are a number of areas where teachers and those in managerial and administrative positions take advantage of the 'determinist' theory and attempt to avoid responsibility. To accept employment as a teacher within a certain community carries with it obligations to work within the educational structures as they are set up. Teachers who complain and make excuses about the nature of the children, the facilities, and the size of classes may well be acting in an irresponsible manner. A teacher's performance within a school can be assessed but it would be difficult to know the degree to which blame or praise can be apportioned. If the teacher has the knowledge and skills and by his own volition does not use them, then he may be regarded as irresponsible. If, on the other hand, he performs poorly and does not possess the degree of knowledge and skill, the degree to which he can be regarded as irresponsible must logically diminish. If we use responsibility in the more general institutional sense then we find that blanket claims such as 'All teachers are responsible for .....!' can only reasonably be used to guide and not to blame. Interestingly since the criteria for (a) education, (b) the educated person and (c) the acceptable curriculum are not at all clear, it is in practice very difficult indeed not to accept teacher claims for extenuating circumstances.

<sup>1</sup>I refer here to media reportage at both national and local levels of community acceptance of material compiled as part of the Social Education Materials Project sect. Family Melbourne, Curric. Devlpt. Centre, 1977.

There are cases, however, where a type of 'rule-utilitarianism' is seen as necessary and justice for the individual is sacrificed for what could be considered the good of the majority. Most of society's laws and school rules are developed on this basis but in the majority of cases justice is seen to be done by the acceptance of extenuating circumstances. The teacher might suffer from an assessment system in which those who sit in judgment of his performances do not fully take into account extenuating circumstances. Again the community is not really in the position to sit in judgment although there are many issues relating to the teacher's moral relationships with children that are open to their scrutiny. I refer here of course to the general notion that education should be carried out in a morally acceptable manner. The acceptance by teachers of certain learning theories and the development of teaching practices based upon these theories can frequently raise very complex moral issues. Consider the application of behaviour modification techniques to 'difficult children'. Does the teacher have the right or responsibility to modify a young child's behaviour?

Once a teacher has what might be regarded as reasonable access to the areas of knowledge involved in the educational process and does not by his own volition open up such access for his pupils he could be accused of being irresponsible. Often one hears staffroom comments such as 'Johnny is too dull to teach', or 'Grade 7A is not worth wasting my valuable time on', from experienced teachers. In the majority of cases it seems that they have allowed their emotions and perhaps the socializing effects of the particular school to bias their attitudes and affect their professional judgment. Teachers who allow their ego to be boosted by receptive and intelligent children and who reject those who are dull and uninteresting could well be accused of acting in an unprofessional and irresponsible manner. It could be argued that such emotional feelings are 'natural' but to imply that this may be used as an excuse or as an extenuating circumstance

would be to seriously diminish any claim for professional status teachers might be making.

Generally it can be argued that the teacher has a responsibility to the community, in which he has chosen to work, to carry out his educational obligations to the best of his ability. If his freedom to carry out the tasks for which he has specifically contracted is interfered with, the responsibility may lapse. As the task of educating relates closely to basic moral principles, it would seem that the teacher is not bound to override these in favour of what might seem to be conflicting community-based values.

Furthermore, the relationship between teacher and community is hardly one way. Members of the community do have a responsibility to the teacher in that to the best of their collective ability they should respect and help him carry out his task. Criticism through ill-founded gossip or traditional prejudices based on past school experiences could be regarded as irresponsible acts. However, as indicated previously, a degree of tolerance must be given when community attitudes do not seem to reflect the degree of responsibility desired. Like many other human relationships the responsibility link between teacher and community seems to lack any satisfactory 'hard-edged' criteria.

Perhaps one of the most direct responsibility issues facing the young teacher relates to his or her place in the authority structure of the school. In practice this varies from school to school and changes in response to the ways in which the organizational structure reflects the specific educational theory pursued. Owens, 1970, points out that

In the case of schools the organizational aspects of classical theory appear to be most in evidence.

He goes on to suggest that -

when we think of classical theory we emphasize concepts such as authority, a clear cut hierarchy with centralized control, a definite division of functions and orderly channels of communication.<sup>1</sup>

State education departments and the majority of private schools in this country are based on a traditional bureaucratic system where clearly defined responsibility levels are pre-determined. These types of institutional responsibilities in one sense do not take into account individual capabilities although it is assumed that the teacher is aware of them and that the employer is satisfied that those appointed are capable of undertaking them. In this sense it might be suggested that to some extent institutional responsibility and that based on an objective view of the specific situation do merge. However, institutional responsibility does not refer as directly to the professional task (i.e. educating) as it does to ensuring that the hierarchical order of authority and decision making is rigidly and impartially maintained. What is most difficult in education is the balance which must be maintained to see that the structures set up to organize the tasks ensure a healthy balance between the maintenance of the administrative structure and the achievement of the tasks. For example, a school might run smoothly and efficiently but may be doing so at the expense of the quality of education taking place within it. The teacher may find that he is faced with a dilemma between responsibility to the institution and responsibility to the pupils and perhaps the profession. Ideally this type of situation should not arise but in practice problems of this nature seem to be inevitable.

Pusey in a study of the Tasmanian system, attempts to shed light on this problem by referring to three particular models: the bureaucratic, the technical and that based on personal relations.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Owens, R.G. Organizational Behaviour in Schools, New Jersey, P. Hall, 1970, p. 47.

<sup>2</sup>M. Pusey, Dynamics of Bureaucracy, Sydney, Wiley & Sons, 1976, Ch.2.

Explained briefly, the first relates to the distribution of authority, the second to the technical processes needed to produce specified objectives and the third to the effects of personality interaction. The effects of the technical and human relation aspect on the bureaucratic structure seem to pinpoint the main practical problems relating to responsibility. Pusey sees the problems as arising from the fact that many of those involved in schools do not clearly see the way in which the values of each model are interwoven in the task of educating.

Ideally we might assume that the school organization and its administration is set up to 'maximize the educative process'.<sup>1</sup> Full acknowledgement of the skills and values of the process and the vital role individual relationships play would currently seem to be essential aspects of the administrative procedure. What appears to have happened is that the traditional structures were set up without a full realization of the changing roles and nature of the other two. The 'unresolved tensions, conflicts and imbalances between',<sup>2</sup> these dimensions would seem to be basic causes of responsibility problems.

If, as Pusey suggests, those involved in education are not fully perceptive to the major causes of conflict within the system, perhaps such analysis can provide those involved in teacher education with some positive areas to cover. It seems that many of those in administrative positions of authority and responsibility are not adequately equipped academically to continually monitor and assess the educational worth of their decisions. This cannot be learnt by experience if the experience is not one which provides such focus and emphasis. A school principal may learn how to cope with most practical responsibilities related to the organization and

<sup>1</sup> Walker, W.G. The Principal at Work, Brisbane, Uni. of Queensland Press, 1965, p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> Pusey, M. Dynamics of Bureaucracy, Sydney, Wiley & Sons, 1976, p.44..

running of a school through experience while at the same time remain ignorant of, or reject, vital issues which are difficult but necessary to the educative process.

If it is agreed that an institution set up to maximize the educative process is not doing this, it seems reasonable to suggest that those in administrative and authority positions relating to that institution are either irresponsible or in serious need of experiences, academic or otherwise, which will enable them to at least perceive and ideally remedy the situation. A young teacher who enters the institution should not have to face expectations and associated responsibilities which might arise from such a situation. There will always be issues where conflict does arise but these should not be derived from the educational ignorance of those in a position higher in the authority structure.

One must look closely at the nature of the responsibility the teacher has to those above him. A teacher finds that he may be officially responsible to a senior master and ultimately to the school principal. This means that he is in effect answerable to, and can officially be assessed and reprimanded by them. If we apply the responsibility notion on a more rational basis we may well find that the responsibility the senior master has to the teacher lower on the hierarchical scale is somewhat greater than vice versa. The senior master is deemed to have greater teaching expertise and therefore has a greater degree of responsibility. It seems that it could be argued that morally one's responsibility to others is always equal and is only strengthened or weakened by factors which one could hold as being reasonably modifying circumstances. This would lead to a greater obligation from mature to immature, aware to unaware, and even educated to uneducated. It seems only reasonable that those in authority with greater knowledge and skill must be held as being more culpable.

Teachers inevitably face loyalty dilemmas. They often have difficulty with overlapping responsibilities between the institution, the profession and the child. On any school staff there is usually a marked division relating to such loyalties. Gouldner has pointed out that individuals in organizations occupy certain latent roles which centre around the personal loyalty or attachment they feel to the organization. He labels them 'locals' and 'cosmopolitans'.

Cosmopolitans may be described as those whose commitment is essentially to their profession whereas locals are those whose prime loyalty is to the organization.<sup>1</sup>

Gouldner's role definitions provide an interesting insight into organizational behaviour and emphasize the need for some value analysis of it.

Should teachers direct the main thrust of their professional responsibility towards the institution or to their profession? If they feel that the basic objectives of both school and profession are one and the same, then no real conflict occurs, but it is only rarely that such harmony is achieved. The very idealistic nature of the concept makes its practical administration a complex and difficult process. It seems that the professional educator must not only be knowledgeable and skilled within his own specialist area but be very aware of the political and economic implications which affect the general administration of education within the society. Without this he would not be in a position to cope with responsibility conflicts or improve the current situation. It is not merely a question of loyalty to institution or profession but one of being able to make a compromise using the best theory and information available.

The teacher initially undertakes to work in a school or within an organization which is set up for the purpose of educating. In this sense those in positions of authority with relation to that

<sup>1</sup>Owens, R.G. op.cit., p. 203.

institution are responsible to that teacher to see that he is placed in a position where he can freely practise his profession. It is pleasing to see that far greater efforts are being made in relation to this responsibility, particularly as it affects young and inexperienced teachers.<sup>1</sup> It was not long ago when teachers on their first appointment could expect to be given not only the heaviest teaching load but also a relatively disproportionate share of difficult lower stream classes or groups.

Peters and Hirst make the relevant point that 'the work of the most brilliant teacher can be nullified if the ethos of the institution in which he works is alien to all that he is trying to convey'.<sup>2</sup> They go on to say that school

rules may become ritualized out of all proportion to their necessity; an authority structure may develop a life of its own and provide power and prestige for individuals whose competence is quite unrelated to the skills necessary to administer the institution.<sup>3</sup>

What can be equally disturbing in this loyalty dilemma is structure or rather, the lack of it which develops from a reaction against the use of authority at any level. Obviously an organization as large and complex as a school must be ordered and decision making must be placed in the hands of those most skilled and capable. In other words, those given jobs of authority should be those who are regarded as authorities in the areas concerned. It seems that this should not be confused with the type of authoritarianism which might uphold the strength of the organization but could prove to be unjust and wholly unsuited to the basic nature of the educational process.<sup>4</sup> From another point of view it is vital that teachers realize that minimal procedures and rules are necessary for education to take

<sup>1</sup> I refer here in particular to Tasmanian Education Department policy. See p. 191 Secondary Education in Tasmania, Scott, 1977, and rec. A104, p.233.

<sup>2</sup> Hirst, P.H. and Peters, R.S. Logic of Education, London, R.K.P., 1970, p.1

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*, p. 108.

<sup>4</sup> Henry, J. and Taylor, W. Role of the Head, Peters, R.S. ed. London, R.K.P., 1976, p.41.



place in an equitable and just fashion.<sup>1</sup>

As schools are being given greater autonomy the range of responsibilities facing the principal would seem to be far greater than that facing the assistant teacher. Traditionally the principal has been expected to be a person of high moral standing. In 1872, Harding wrote

A master should conduct himself in his private affairs in a manner becoming his calling. He should choose really respectable people for his friends and should be careful to keep himself from the beerhouse.<sup>2</sup>

He later

noted that some heads cane teachers in front of the scholars; this, however, is not recommended as it lowers the teacher in the children's estimation. Correction should be suited to the office.<sup>3</sup>

These examples illustrate some of the extremely traditional attitudes which seem to still play an important role in responsibility claims made, and expectations of principals today. It would appear that established attitudes are slow to change. According to Bernbaum, 1973, recent research in Britain has shown that little work has been done in relation to the role of the head and that most references to it are simplistic and stereotyped. Pusey, (1976) did provide some insight into the problems surrounding this role in Tasmanian secondary schools. He said that although some principals spoke with pleasure about some of the tangible physical aspects of their school this

<sup>1</sup>Hirst, P.H. & Peters, R.S. op.cit., p. 115.

<sup>2</sup>Taylor, W. Harding: quoted from "Practical Handbook of School Management for Teachers, Pupil Teachers and Students", 1872, Role of the Head, R.K.P., 1976, Ch. 2, p. 37.

<sup>3</sup>Harding, quoted from "Practical Handbook of School Management for Teachers, Pupil Teachers and Students", 1872 Peters, Role of the Head, R.K.P. 1976, p.38.

seemed to be outweighed by diffuse uncertainties and anxieties concerning their own role as well as less tangible social and moral aspects of school organization.<sup>1</sup>

He also pointed out that the degree of insecurity perceived seemed to be related to what one might call an 'illusion of total "responsibility" which seems to be prevalent among them'.<sup>2</sup> Pusey argues that one of the main reasons for these problems is the fact that school principals are not adequately equipped in an academic sense to see their role in a reasoned and logical manner. According to his research only three of the thirty-two principals interviewed had more than one year of graduate study in education and this did not seem to provide the formal knowledge necessary for them to grasp and interpret education department policy statements which draw on sophisticated arguments. Since Pusey made these observations more school principals in Tasmania have undertaken postgraduate work but it seems that the question surrounding role responsibility still remains. The manner in which policy is passed from the education department to the school still appears to be confusing. The reasons for this relates to the fact that over-specification of policy would negate or hinder the current moves towards individual school autonomy. This is, I believe, illustrated in the recent review on secondary education in this State (Tas. 1977).<sup>3</sup> The document varies considerably in the manner in which it makes its recommendations and has caused a degree of conflict and uncertainty in the minds of school principals.<sup>4</sup> The general impression is that schools are to have more autonomy and the principals will, therefore, be given increased responsibility. I will quote from several recommendations each of which might seem to be reasonable as separate issues, but combined tend to make the responsibility issue complex, ambiguous and perhaps inoperable:

<sup>1</sup>Pusey, M. op.cit. p.74.

<sup>2</sup>ibid, p.74.

<sup>3</sup>Secondary Education in Tasmania, Ed. Dept. of Tas., 1977.

<sup>4</sup>This was my own impression after speaking with a number of Tasmanian principals and vice-principals (1977).

- e.g.
- (i) All secondary teachers ensure that opportunities for students to make decisions about their learning be built into all programmes.<sup>1</sup> (pp.161-162).
  - (ii) The importance of the leadership role of the principal in secondary schools should be recognized. Principals should be supported in their development of this role.<sup>2</sup> (pp.169-170, 131).
  - (iii) Teachers in secondary schools should be able to participate in decision making.<sup>3</sup> (p.132, 168, 171 F).
  - (iv) The Education Department provide opportunities for existing secondary principals to undertake leadership courses based on understanding organisations and the people in them<sup>4</sup>. (p.36, 170, 188-189).

Perhaps one of the main reasons for confusion is based again on the rather loose interchange between legal or institutional responsibility implications and those based on the more rational-moral sense. Obviously school principals who are aware of the issues involved in a complex educational institution are also aware of the fact that they themselves may not be qualified to make all decisions or be fully involved in all decision making.<sup>5</sup> In fact, the implications of recommendation B62 of the report quoted above, make it clear that the principal is not the only one aware of this fact.

<sup>1</sup> ibid, rec. C50, p.231.

<sup>2</sup> ibic, princ. A90, p. 231.

<sup>3</sup> ibic, princ, A91, p.231.

<sup>4</sup> ibic, rec., B62, p.231.

<sup>5</sup> Peters, R.S. Role of the Head. R.K.P., 1976, pp.4-5.

As most school principals have little if any involvement in staff selection their overall responsibility with regards the general performance of the school must be limited accordingly. Although the basic bureaucratic model with its inbuilt responsibility roles has organizational value the principal must not allow these to be confused with the specific rational responsibilities which relate to him as a person.

A situation can occur where a principal is given ultimate responsibility for school policy which, in turn, leads him to believe that all decisions if not made by him should at least involve and be sanctioned by him. The conflict occurs when he weighs what he sees or feels to be his institutional responsibility against the more rational moral responsibility of involving staff, parents and even students in these procedures. Unfortunately, the result can be one where he feels it necessary to make intuitive decisions in areas where he lacks knowledge and expertise. Peters might be understating when he makes the point that

nothing is more frustrating in democracy than being summoned to go through making a decision and for it to be revealed, in the end, that the decision is really one of consultation.<sup>1</sup>

Such observations lead me to suggest that both school principals and those higher on the authority structure should analyze and clarify the responsibility issue. By clarification I do not necessarily mean simplification, because to do so might be to negate many of the real values involved. It does, I believe, mean setting some clear distinction between the types of emotive cliches which stress loyalty and devotion to duty and those statements which outline realistic obligations to fulfil meaningful educational tasks. Of course it must be realized that some teaching areas or disciplines are limited, by their very nature, in the degree to which they can be

<sup>1</sup>ibid, p.6.

tightly specified. This also raises the problem of deciding upon the amount and type of task specification which can be given before conflict develops in relation to professional freedom. One can only be sympathetic with problems which develop in relation to the devolution of responsibility in this area, but I believe it is extremely important to continually relate it to the ethical impact and effect it has on the individuals involved.

Problems of task definition obviously multiply when objectives are changed rapidly, are added to frequently and indiscriminately, or are left vague. Professor B. Start, speaking at the 5th Annual Conference of the Tasmanian Chapter of the Australian College of Education (July, 1977) made the valid point that

schools should not allow themselves to become the repository of tasks and responsibilities that other agencies of society had given up.<sup>1</sup>

Other speakers at the conference emphasized the fact that teachers should be considered teachers not amateur operators over wide-ranging social areas. It is one thing to take on a responsibility but another to handle it with the knowledge and skill necessary for it to be regarded as having educational value.

What is the 'autonomous' school principal to do? The increasing pressures placed upon him to broaden the objectives of the school, to innovate, to increase subject choice and to welcome a greater degree of parent and community involvement could well lead to a situation where basic educational objectives are overlooked. By this I am not questioning the values of innovation, curriculum development and community involvement but they must be seen as means of achieving educational ends not merely as ends in themselves. From my own observations and comments made by school principals during a series of school visits recently (1976-7) principals are confused over

<sup>1</sup> Prof. B. Start (Prof. Ed. Psych., Melb. Uni.), Examiner Newspaper, Launceston, Mon. July 18th, 1977.

such issues. They are not clear about their responsibilities and there is a lack of clarity over the distinction between moral-rational responsibility and institutional responsibility.

Arising from the obvious difficulties involved Peters asks the question as to whether there is any necessity for a school to appoint a permanent principal. He queries some of the traditional views by asking if -

heads do possess an excess of specialized knowledge on all aspects of school life and curriculum which gives them the right to override the views of their staff. Vice-chancellors of universities would not dream of dictating to their staff about such matters. Is the head of a school in a fundamentally different position.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps we should ask whether the principal does have the right, does he assume it, or is he invalidly given it. Traditionally university staff have been more highly respected as authorities in their own right than have school teachers. This seems to depend on the extent to which the teacher is regarded as a person with professional expertise and academic authority.

In attempting to analyze such claims it is also important to take into account the type of school in question. Principals in small primary schools may well have the expertise and knowledge to see their institutional and rational-moral responsibility roles as being closely aligned. The principal of a larger, more complex organization might well find that although the general educational hierarchical structure places him in a similar role, his responsibilities are of a vastly different nature. He does not have the depth or breadth of subject expertise to accept full responsibility for them. He must devolve responsibilities in the direction of those qualified to handle them. Although there may be an institutional increase in

<sup>1</sup>Peters, R.S. op.cit., p.4.

responsibility it may well be that the logic of the situation actually decreases his rational and moral responsibility.

It seems that in the current climate teachers are becoming more conscious of the expertise they have and the professional freedom needed to use it. Any authoritarian interference, from those in hierarchiacal positions, not based on sound acceptable and educationally justifiable reasons could seriously limit the real value of the institutions. As Hirst and Peters point out

a rational case can be made for authority in institutions if its exercise is clearly related to the purposes of the institution and if staff are appointed on relevant grounds to discharge various responsibilities on the community's behalf. Universities and schools are centrally concerned with the advancement and transmission of various forms of skill and knowledge; so it follows that these overriding purposes should determine the structure of authority within such institutions.<sup>1</sup>

Teachers not only seem to face conflicting responsibilities between institutional limitations and the ideals proposed for their profession but more particularly in relation to the welfare of individual children. According to an excerpt from a recent edition of the Tasmanian Teacher's Journal, teachers should guide their pupils 'to attain the highest level of mental, moral and physical health and academic achievement'.<sup>2</sup> It is obvious that the degree to which they might see themselves fulfilling such responsibilities is severely limited by the schooling system. Given that such guidance is desirable, a secondary school teacher might find that he has 180 individual students per week and that because of class size and teaching load 5 minutes individual attention per student per week is all that is available to him. The extent to which he can really assess the value of his teaching under such circumstances emphasizes the

<sup>1</sup>Hirst, P.H. & Peters, R.S. Logic of Education, London, R.K.P., p.116.

<sup>2</sup>Tas. Teachers' Journal, June, 1977.

problems he might have in attempting to realize the assigned responsibilities. Although many would agree that a teacher's main responsibility is to his individual students, schools are organized in such a way that assessment of performance based on this criterion is practically impossible to make. Because of this difficulty teachers are judged not on this criterion but on organizational and leadership qualities which tend to relate more to the running of the institution. The quality of their actual personal contribution to the education of each individual child often seems to be overlooked.

Professional codes such as the one quoted tend to be, or become, idealistic guides or procedural principles which it is hoped remind the teacher of the direction he or she should be taking. Another section of this code, relating to the importance of justice and reason,<sup>1</sup> is probably more easily assessed but it does in practice hinge very much on the 'utilitarian' nature of the institution. Schools deal with large numbers of students. Rules and organizational procedures tend to be based on the principle of what is best for the majority. There seems to be a very delicate line for the teacher to tread in relation to his moral obligation to follow such rules and regulations and those which direct him

to all times deal justly and reasonably and humanely with pupils regardless of their physical, mental, emotional, political, economic, social, racial or religious characteristics.<sup>2</sup>

Can this be achieved if procedures are based on a utilitarian approach? It seems that the school must develop rules so that the individual teacher can exercise his professional right to deal with individual cases on their own merits. Some may well argue that the complex nature of organization necessary for a large school to function could not allow for such 'ad hoc' decision making.

<sup>1</sup> ibid.

<sup>2</sup> ibid.



Where teachers are given this type of responsibility it is also necessary for them to view every action in the light of its indirect effect on others and on the institution. It is not enough for a teacher to develop an excellent working relationship with an individual pupil if this is going to cause problems for that pupil with other teachers or for other pupils. The greater freedom the teacher has the more difficult his assessment and fulfilling responsibility becomes. When teachers stress their priorities in favour of direct responsibility to their pupils they must be careful to see that this does not have any detrimental effects on the child's relationship with other teachers or cause any undue administrative difficulties. It would seem that it is necessary for teachers to be aware of, and willing to participate in, all aspects of school life which might aid or negate their own contribution. Without such desire and awareness the actual claim of responsibility might amount to little more than a mild moral encouragement.

Teachers may enter into a contract to teach in a school where the authoritarian structure does not allow them the responsibility they feel they need. This situation may seem to be quite unsatisfactory but from a practical point of view one could ask the question as to whether being free and more responsible and not fully succeeding is really much better than being limited, less responsible but carrying out the task in a successful manner. This seems to be a rather negative view but it must be realized that the real value of greater individual responsibility for the teacher can only be proportional to the skill, knowledge and attitudes he possesses.

The position of the primary or infant teacher differs somewhat from that of the secondary specialist in that he or she is in a situation to monitor far more closely the individual progress of students. The teaching load is high and the subject range is demanding but there seems to be a far more direct responsibility relationship between teacher and child than is able to be achieved

in the secondary situation. This closer relationship places the teacher in a position where he is able to be more aware of the educational dysfunctions of the organization and therefore more able to be involved in overcoming them.

The difference in the type of educational responsibility teachers in primary and secondary schools have towards individual children is particularly significant. The type of overall responsibility with its corresponding freedom enjoyed by the individual primary teacher must be shared among many in the secondary situation. If the school is well-organized the task can be shared but there are considerable difficulties involved in sharing the moral aspects. It is difficult to envisage a group or institution being able to share moral responsibility with anywhere near the degree of commitment, obligation or indeed motivation that one might expect from the individual. In fact, it could well be argued that it is logically impossible for the meaning of the concept to remain the same when it is applied to any party other than an individual person.

If group or shared responsibility has this weakness should greater responsibility for overall student progress be given to individual teachers? One positive limitation is the capability of educators to cope in a competent manner with a wide variety of subject areas. It is accepted that infant and primary teachers can cope with this demand although the ever-increasing scope of the curriculum does make their task difficult. Some secondary schools intent on easing the problems of transition from primary school have introduced a system which gives 'across the curriculum' responsibility to class teachers. This approach raises the question of basic educational philosophy and theory. If the school system views knowledge in a more universal objective manner<sup>1</sup> then it would mean that the teacher's ability to competently handle a wide variety of disciplines at secondary school level must be questioned. If, on the other hand,

<sup>1</sup>Hirst, P.H. Knowledge and the Curriculum, R.K.P., London, 1974.

the school embraces a more sociological interpretation of knowledge, the depth of specialization seen as essential would be far less. As Young<sup>1</sup> suggested, curriculum selection becomes more ad hoc and could be organized as the individual teacher sees fit. There would seem to be value in structuring the educational institution in such a way that more individual responsibility could be assigned to the teacher but this must be weighed against other objectives. Increased individual responsibility would aid the teacher and the process but care must be taken to see that any moves in this direction are assessed in the light of the total educational philosophy being embraced.

For a teacher to fulfil his obligations to the institution it is important that these obligations are made clear. I do not mean that they should be simplified because to simplify might be to overlook issues which are important though complex. What does concern me is the way in which schools and the authority bodies which control them formulate and structure their academic and professional policies. In this State the education department acknowledges the fact that

the school operates within important constraints particularly those of finance and staffing, but within these limits is able to develop its own curriculum emphasis and school organization.<sup>2</sup>

However, it must be realized that

the central administration cannot yield to demands for freedom from supervision for this would be a renunciation of the necessary requirement that in a state education system schools must be held accountable both to the Education Department and Minister responsible to Parliament for the school system and to the community which they are ultimately serving.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Lawton, D. op.cit., p.58.

<sup>2</sup>Secondary Education in Tasmania, Ed. Dept. of Tas., 1977, p.33.

<sup>3</sup>ibid, p.33.

The secondary school report from which I have quoted outlines a common set of educational purposes for Tasmanian secondary schools and a common core-curriculum. Within this general framework a variety of acceptable approaches is envisaged and, outside the specified core areas, all aspects of curriculum development are seen as the responsibility of the school. The committee

identified a core of six broad areas of activity in which the school should attempt to involve all students. These are language, mathematics, gaining insights into the physical environment, gaining insights into the social and cultural environment, experience in the arts and crafts and a consideration of the problems of humanity that concern and puzzle adolescents. In addition to these six areas the Committee considers that all students should be involved in physical education.<sup>1</sup>

The report goes on to make mention of the fact that these areas cut across subject boundaries and therefore become the concern of all teachers.<sup>2</sup>

I have quoted extensively from this report because it illustrates a basic source of conflict facing the secondary teacher. At present he or she is trained, appointed and organized within the school structure on a subject basis. Such organization is traditional, but it does indicate an underlying acceptance of the view that knowledge can and should be divided into various categories. The core-curriculum as presented tends to undermine the value of such subject division by stressing the breakdown of subject barriers. If such a division is to be abandoned, substantial reasons should be provided. The production of a rather 'ad hoc' list of curriculum suggestions does not in itself provide us with such reasons. In fact, it would be very difficult to maintain that suggestions relating to 'insights into environment' and 'consideration of the problems of humanity' could be seen as core or basic principles for curriculum development. The immediate responsibility problem revolves around

<sup>1</sup> ibid, op.cit., p.83.

<sup>2</sup> ibid, p.83.

the fact that most, if not all, teachers are not trained sufficiently to either develop curriculum in such areas or to teach them. The knowledge and skill needed for teachers to responsibly cut across subject boundaries would seem to be grossly underestimated. Teachers do accept such challenges but to do so might also be to challenge any 'professional' or claims of authority they might wish to make.

Teachers find themselves in a position where they are expected to put forward views and teach in areas where they are at best educated laymen. They may have some expertise in relation to the passing on of skills or knowledge but surely this is worth little if it is not accompanied by an ability to select the skills, knowledge or attitudes that are most desirable to pass on. The 'core curriculum' does not answer basic questions such as what is meant by 'gaining insights or considering problems'. Are teachers to involve themselves in passing on values? If so are these values to be society-based? Given a sound philosophical background and more direction relating to the underlying values of these curriculum suggestions, a competent group of teachers could well develop an acceptable curriculum. In practice, however, I feel that the value of using a core curriculum of this nature to fulfil a hierarchical institutional responsibility link with schools is dubious and can only add to the confusions of obligation which face teachers.

Recently I experienced a situation in a secondary school which served to illustrate some of the problems mentioned above. A group of 70 first-year students were noisily making 'art mobiles' supervised by a mathematics, a science and two home economics teachers. The fact that no specialist art teacher was involved in the project did not seem to concern the teachers present nor did it curb their enthusiasm. In fact, they seemed to revel in the knowledge that they were as ignorant about art as the students. It was explained to me that one of the main aims of the school was to innovate and do what it could to break down subject barriers. I was concerned that the children seemed to be learning little but I was told that the main value was in the social interaction taking place. When I enquired as to how this took place or how it was assessed,

I was assured that it just happens. The idea was that children learn to live together by being placed together. The teachers were not only in a position where they could not make use of their subject expertise but they also seemed to know little about the educational methods and values relating to ethical and sociological issues.

It is obvious that many young teachers face incredible responsibility conflicts when they find themselves in a situation where the philosophy structure of the school runs contrary to that of their training and understanding. If the situation described above could be regarded as unsatisfactory, who is to blame? The teachers involved seemed to accept the approach. Whether this is because they lacked sufficient knowledge to critically assess what they were doing and therefore accepted it or whether they were critical but found it expedient to move with the institutionally accepted trends is difficult to say. A considerable degree of responsibility must be taken by those decision makers within the school and those in authority at departmental level who structure and encourage such developments. At this level it is essential that those involved have educational expertise commensurate with their position. A.V. Gough (Director General of Education) makes this view clear when he comments on the superintendent's role. He says that

there is a need for his authority to stem from acceptance due to personal administrative and academic qualities of a high order rather than formal power derived from a closely defined position in a hierarchy.<sup>1</sup>

This is certainly an acceptable position but we must still face questions such as what can be regarded as high order administrative and academic qualities and who is responsible for deciding on the criteria for judging this. The nature of knowledge seen as acceptable by the society concerned provides criteria and it is, therefore, very necessary for the philosophers interested in education to be involved. Our society seems to accept an objectivist theory of knowledge and yet we find that our schools seem to willingly embrace strong

<sup>1</sup>Gough, A.V. "Tasmanian Teacher", Tas. Teachers' Fed., Aug. 1977. p.2.

society-based relativist influences. Many of the responsibility conflicts seem to arise out of the lack of conceptual analysis in these areas. Schools fall into the trap of innovating without developing a criterion for assessing the values of such innovation. Without a set of universally acceptable principles as guidelines the school or group of teachers sets its own knowledge and value criteria. This in turn can lead to a situation where the means of education become the professed ends and assessment becomes meaningless.

For our education system to improve it seems that decision makers must ask the right questions. In order to do this they must have access to philosophical analysis and enquiry. The responsibility conflicts which face young teachers do seem to stem from a lack of understanding at this level by one or other of the two groups involved. This means that improved pre-service training must be balanced by a high standard of in-service training being made available for those at all levels in the hierarchical structure.

Another perplexing question teachers must face relates to their responsibility to parents. When referring to general relationships with the community those most vocal and concerned about the educational practices taking place are the parents of the children involved. One assumes that a teacher, being a responsible person in the general moral sense, will treat the parent with the same respect that he would treat any other human being. As we assume that the teacher has a special responsibility to the community in which he works parents are also closely involved in this responsibility relationship. The question which is difficult to answer is the degree to which the teacher has a specific responsibility to the parents of the children he actually teaches. The extent of this type of responsibility seems to be dependent on the rights parents have with regards to their own children.

The actual task of specifying the rights of a parent is complex and relates very closely to the moral values of the society

concerned. As Barrow points out that

any assertion that there is a specific right is in fact a disguised appeal to some particular scheme of moral values. The appropriate response to any statement of the form 'man has the right ....' is to ask what reasons can be given for claiming that man should have this right. Such a response will plunge one immediately into a fullscale discussion about ethics.<sup>1</sup>

In western society norms have been established which give parents the right to decide on the most suitable methods of rearing and educating their young. Most parents desire this responsibility and within certain guidelines society willingly approves of it. Laws have been established to deal with extreme cases of parental irresponsibility and these aim to protect children and provide them with a degree of equality of opportunity. Society seems to make a reasonable compromise in its attempts to honour the rights and responsibilities of parents but there are still many contentious issues in areas such as education. Compulsory education aims to protect the rights of children in that it provides a form of protection from irresponsible actions of parents. Also, it can be argued that it is one method of society ensuring a continuation of its values and culture.

Some parents consider that society does not have the right to demand compulsory education and others are particularly critical of that which is provided. Some argue that the parent has the right to decide on the educational objectives of the institution in which his child is taught and go to the extreme of suggesting that the teacher's responsibility is to merely provide the means to these ends. This type of argument has merit but it does raise a number of complex issues. Providing compulsory education is an expensive business and must be done in a collective situation. The State could not afford to cater for each child on an individual basis. Some parents are in a position

<sup>1</sup>Barrow, R. Moral Philosophy for Education, London, Allen & Unwin, 1975, p.145.



to make suggestions which will benefit their offspring in an educational sense while others are not. Who is to decide? It is again only reasonable to assume that such a responsibility should be given to those with the professional expertise and necessary moral qualities.

The parent can be so emotionally involved with his children he has difficulty in taking a rational and objective view in relation to them. The degree to which society will tolerate such claims of rights depends very much on its established moral principles and their order of priority. Teachers must face the conflict between that which parents regard as their rights and that which society considers as necessary. They are closely linked and one would hope that the same moral principles underly each.

Unfortunately, 'the Law determines neither what is to count as education nor what parents rights are. The teacher's rights are thus highly ambiguous'.<sup>1</sup> Sockett goes on to elaborate on the difficulties in relation to this by saying that

we have no guide as to the wise and good parents' desires. It is this vacuum that teachers may look at with some unease if they teach in maintained (state run) schools. No such worries need concern teachers in private schools for the payment of fees, if nothing else, indicates approval of what goes on.<sup>2</sup>

When Sockett mentions 'wise and good' parents it does remind us that the parents' responsibility to their children must not be overlooked. It is assumed that the parent accepts those basic ethical principles upheld by the society in general. Often they do but do not consistently apply them. Strong emotion and feeling tends to cloud the issue making logical application of such principles difficult. The parent is primarily concerned with the welfare of the individual child whereas the teacher, although sympathetic to this ideal, is forced by the nature of the situation, to take a more utilitarian approach. He can be seen by the parent as being cold and unsympathetic. The

<sup>1</sup> Sockett, H. article Bridges & Scrimshaw: Values and Authority in Schools, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1975, p.51.

<sup>2</sup> ibid, p.51.

parent seems to be obliged to understand and endeavour to accept the teacher's limitations in this regard. Those who reject the philosophy and traditions of the local state school are entitled to seek alternative education but where this is not possible it would seem that both teacher and parent are mutually responsible to co-operate in the best interests of the child. Where a disagreement arises it is difficult to know which of the two, parent or teacher can make the final judgment.

Before attempting to clarify the teacher's responsibility to the parent it is necessary to examine the parent's responsibility to and for the child. Does this diminish as the child matures and becomes more self-sufficient? Common law suggests that it does. The young child needs care and protection at a physical and mental level. As he reaches adolescence his physical dependence decreases but there may be some doubts as to whether mental dependence decreases at the same rate. Generally, the sense of responsibility referred to in this relationship is one of care and protection. The teacher's educational responsibilities are divided between the general moral sense which would remain constant regardless of the age or maturity of the child and that related to task. The latter would vary with the type of group and is seen as being more demanding when young children are involved.

The teacher's responsibility to the parent is a very debatable issue. Society grants the parent rights which diminish as the child becomes more independent. The greater the parents rights are in relation to the child the greater the teacher's obligations appear to be towards the parent. The question of transfer of rights from parent to teacher is not at all clear. Teachers find it difficult to know whether any such rights have been transferred and therefore what their responsibilities are. Although the teacher is obliged to co-operate with the parent and take into account certain desires and wishes he cannot be expected to accede in any direction

which oversteps the rational and moral boundaries of his profession. Although society accepts parent's rights with regard to their children, parents do not own them in the sense that they might own a dog or a car. It is generally accepted that education provided by the society is aimed at improving and developing the child for the individual child's sake and not simply to satisfy his parents.

Certainly there are areas where parents have the right to condemn the actions of a teacher but these should only relate to instances where the teacher is not fulfilling his educational and moral responsibilities. Here when I speak of educational responsibilities I am specifying certain minimal conditions. Given these minimal conditions, schools are free to develop their own 'philosophies' or theories and curriculum strategies. In this situation parents should have the freedom to choose which school their children will attend. Once the commitment is made the teachers concerned must be given sufficient freedom to fulfil their educating role. Parents cannot expect teachers to act 'in loco parentis' when the freedom to do so is not granted by either the parent or the law. In fact, many teachers' unions and federations make quite clear the legal dangers facing teachers who develop close relationships with the children they teach.

Regardless of the valid reasons and arguments which would tend to encourage schools to increase their involvement in moral education, it is an area where the teacher must tread very carefully. Many parents are not concerned with the arguments based on objective reason put forward by prominent educationalists such as Wilson, Peters and Hirst because to them right and wrong in relation to their children is strongly influenced by emotion and feeling. Many seem quite adamant about their rights and responsibilities in relation to what is right or wrong for their children. The question which must be faced is whether the teacher has the right to pass on values which are unacceptable to the parents? There are many questions involving

moral philosophy which must be answered. Is everyone entitled to their own feelings and beliefs and can an education system be based on this view? Although it might well be established that logic and reason can provide us with a set of basic moral principles does the teacher have the responsibility or has he the right to attempt to convince parents that logic and reason is right and should prevail?

Finally, I would like to comment on the teacher's responsibility to those he teaches. Regardless of the view that society organizes education in order to maintain its culture or way of life, it seems that today few teachers would argue with the notion that their most direct responsibility is towards the individuals they teach. Most would also agree that ideally the individual is more important than the group. The degree to which this ideal can be fulfilled relates very much to the skills and abilities of the individual teacher and the facilities and structures within which he chooses to work. To stress this point is to stipulate, in a sense, a meaning for the concept of education itself. By the same reasoning Peters put forward when he denied the necessity for aims in education, it would seem that the concept itself implies direction and focus on the development of the individual.<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately we find in practice financial limitations have led our society to organize education on a utilitarian basis. I say unfortunately not to deny certain values of such an approach but to emphasize the obvious conflicts of direction and emphasis which can and do develop in relation to the responsibilities of the individual teacher.

<sup>1</sup>Peters, R.S., Education as Initiation, London, Evans Bros. 1963.

SECTION III

Considerations of responsibility in relation to the educator's task.

Teachers are responsible for carrying out certain tasks. These tasks vary considerably from individual to individual but there are general guidelines and limitations set by the nature of the concept of education being embraced.

If we accept the notion that 'educating' people suggests a family processes whose principle of unity is the development of desirable qualities in them and that it also involves the development of knowledge and understanding the teachers task is given some general focus.<sup>1</sup> For such a definition to be acceptable we must assume that the 'desirable qualities' relate to basic ethical principles held by our society. This being so we must expect our teachers to be knowledgeable in this area. As stressed previously the actual methods used in the educational process should also conform to these principles and should not include indoctrination or conditioning techniques. The teachers task is to pass on skills, knowledge and attitudes taking into account relevant pedagogical implications and curriculum material. His specific tasks will depend on the area in which he has chosen to teach, be it infant, primary, secondary and/or a particular subject or discipline. Ideally he should only be expected to teach in areas where he has expertise and his responsibilities should be given and accepted with this in mind. Obviously he must be educated himself and adequately prepared for the role. The teacher must have the ability to make wise and informed decisions within broadly based parameters. Are these parameters too broadly based and are they sufficiently clear?

According to Sureties, 1974, a teacher should be educated to the degree that he has

... a sufficient understanding of the western cultural and intellectual tradition to see current problems in perspective; an adequate level of intellectual maturity, expressing itself in soundness of judgement and the kind of mental balance in which commitment and rationality are not at variance; an incisiveness of thought enabling

<sup>1</sup>Hirst, P.H. & Peters, R.S. Logic of Education, London, R.K.P., 1970, p.25.

adequate sharpness of focus and relevance in discussion and a genuine depth of understanding in at least one discipline or area of study.<sup>1</sup>

He goes on to suggest that the teacher

should be able to think clearly and in some depth about his function in the total education of the child or young person; he should be able to understand and communicate with his pupils; he should have a clearly defined view of his professional commitment; he should be able to diagnose the educational needs of individuals and groups; and he should be equipped with or with the means to acquire the knowledge and skills required to meet these ends.<sup>2</sup>

In reality one might say that few, if any, teachers could fulfil such a demanding set of criteria but it would seem that the degree to which they do relates closely to the degree to which they can be expected to be given educational responsibility. Responsibilities can be given and accepted but as I have stressed previously they would have little rational worth if the person involved is not capable, either intellectually or physically, of carrying out the task. If the claim is merely being made as a figure of speech to oblige the teacher concerned to do his best in a particular situation, then I believe this should be specified.

It seems that the freedom needed for the individual educator to make judgments and take responsibility is limited by the structure within which he is expected to work. The need for many corporate decisions to be made severely limits this freedom and the responsibility accompanying it. The medical practitioner and the lawyer by comparison seem to be in a situation where a clearer and more widely accepted delineation of task makes their individual professional freedom and consequent responsibility more precise and clear cut.

<sup>1</sup> Sureties, B. 'New Directions in Teacher Ed. I.' S. Murray-Smith (ed.), Melbourne Studies in Education, Melbourne University Press, 1974, p.85.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*, p.86.

Where the responsibility for the task moves from the individual to the group or institution the more difficult it becomes to blame anyone specifically if the task remains unfulfilled. On this basis it would seem that the smaller the institution and the more closely tasks can be related to individuals, the greater the chances are that they will be fulfilled. Ideally this problem should not exist. Individuals well educated and professionally trained should be able to co-operate and solve problems in such a way that obligations should not only be clarified and fulfilled but fulfilled in such a way that the corporate skills of the group would contribute to the fulfilment.

The organization of the educative process does need co-operation among experts in various fields but it seems that what is gained by this co-operation is weakened not only by confusion over objectives but also by 'human nature' itself. Man tends to be a 'social animal' who frequently seeks the security of groups. Within the group or institution derived from that group he is secure and can make idealistic claims and promises for which he need not take full personal responsibility. What seems to happen in practice is that many claims made by institutions are often more radical, sweeping and flamboyant because there is an underlying knowledge that corporate responsibility is weak and no individual really has to take the blame if promises and obligations are not fulfilled. This is frequently seen when schools are asked to outline their educational philosophies or when education is being used as a vote-catching platform for a political party. If an individual undertakes a responsibility he is limited and motivated by the knowledge that he alone must take the consequences for his actions. This means that there is less likelihood for rash and 'irresponsible' claims to be made in the first place. Too often the term is used loosely in educational texts.<sup>1</sup> We find the teacher is expected to be 'responsible' for the 'total intellectual, physical, moral and spiritual development of the child', a claim which tends to make a

<sup>1</sup>For example, See p.18, Schools Council Children's Growth Through Creative Experience, 8-13 Project, New York, Reinhold, 1974.



farce of the whole notion since it is impossible to fulfil. Again we are faced with the question of usage and concept clarification.

If it is accepted that the teacher has a responsibility to pass on that which is worthwhile and aid the development of dispositions that are desirable, there is still the problem of identifying a value criterion. If we follow the view that knowledge and truth are based on the norms and values of the society the teacher could be left with a confusing mass of contradictory criteria. Which are the real values if they are contradictory? Obviously a set of more objective and rational criteria is necessary if the teacher is to take anything more than a 'child-minding' role. Even if he does make some decision in this regard, he could easily find himself being accused of indoctrinating his students.

It would also seem that society agrees with the view that the methods used to educate should be limited to those which are based on universally acceptable moral principles. Unfortunately these do not solve the conflicts which arise when we accept both utilitarianism and the rights of the individual.

- As stressed earlier, education is an open-ended concept where the teaching obligations are limited in that the activities involved must conform to a minimal set of standards. The teacher will most likely be expected to be involved in some degree of curriculum planning as well as the teaching process itself.

In relation to this Hirst makes the point that

for any particular curriculum, deciding what the objectives are to be, involves making value judgments of immense complexity and importance.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Hirst, P.H. Knowledge and the Curriculum, London, R.K.P., 1974, p.4.

He goes on to suggest that

curriculum planning is not just a question of whether what is learnt is worthwhile, it is a question of whether or not what we wish to be learnt is in fact being learnt.<sup>1</sup>

Before decisions are made in this direction it is necessary for the teacher to base his planning on some type of structure. Hirst takes the view that

it is a basic philosophical truth about the nature of knowledge that, whether we like it or not, all knowledge is differentiated into a limited number of logically distinct forms or disciplines. ... It means that the objectives of knowledge and understanding we are concerned with in most curricula have an implicit organization, there are distinctions and interrelations between the objectives which must necessarily be organized.<sup>2</sup>

I have referred to Hirst's theories because I believe they clearly outline the types of basic structuring the educator is responsible for. Once the basic objectives are decided upon the teacher is then responsible for selecting morally acceptable suitable methods and putting them into practice.

Unfortunately, a description of this nature is prone to become idealistic. What happens if the teacher does not meet his responsibilities here? In practice it seems that many teachers continue to fall down on their obligations and very little is done about it. For instance it is not uncommon to find teachers using material and methods chosen on the sole criterion that similar material and methods were used when they were students. Suitability in relation to educational objectives is frequently overlooked. It is not until explicit injustice or harm is done to particular groups or individuals that positive action is taken. Even here physical

<sup>1</sup> ibid, p.5.

<sup>2</sup> ibid, pp.5-6.

harm being in itself more explicit or obvious is regarded as being more important than mental harm. Although we might consider that serious retardation of intellectual growth could result from the irresponsible actions of 'incompetent' educators, do we have sufficient knowledge of the complex mental processes involved to make such accusations? We can assess whether a teacher is behaving in what might seem to be a relatively proper and correct manner with his students but can we satisfactorily assess his role in the rather long range 'development of mind' sense? This is surely an area for further investigation. Regardless of these difficulties teachers and institutions are accountable for what they do. For a number of years now, affluent western countries have spent vast sums on education with few questions being asked about the exact nature of that expenditure. Arguments such as justice in relation to private and state school funding have flared up from time to time but generally speaking the values of education and the trust placed in educators have been relatively free from criticism. Being an extremely expensive industry it was probably inevitable that a downturn in the economy would raise the question of accountability. This concept is closely allied to responsibility but it has a strong financial criteria.

Within an ethical context there is every reason why educators should account for what they do. The taxpayer cannot be expected to provide funds if they are to be wasted or used in an irresponsible manner. Teachers are forced into the situation where they must be able to fully justify their particular area of concern. In some subject areas the nature of the task and the justification of the objectives are complex and communication is extremely difficult. This does not mean that accountability is not necessary but it can mean that some areas could be unjustly treated or even totally deleted from some educational proposals. It seems that subject areas most susceptible are those which have 'aesthetic and expressive' objectives.

Nash and Agne make the valid point that in the United States an ethos has developed whereby the governing principles of accountability have been based on a

technological-economic world-view which is distinguished by its frenzied insistence of the large-scale transportation of attitudes and practices from the world of business, engineering and science to the world of education.

They go on to explain how this has tended to reduce

the total educational endeavour to a tired litany of achievement, performance and production characterized by the blank torpor of systems analysis, technological engineering, quality control and replicability.<sup>1</sup>

It is easy to become offended by such a movement but as I have mentioned the educator is obliged to account for his actions, regardless of the resentment assessment procedures might produce. His objectives should have educational value and he must be able to show that the methods he uses are suitable and work. My main concern does not relate directly to this movement but to the lack of satisfactory assessment procedures available to many of the educational disciplines. Two rather simplistic views seem to have developed. One is that only those areas easily assessed should be taught and the other relates to the re-emergence of the 'three R's'. I am not making value judgments on the importance of the 'three R's' but I criticize emphasis on them if it is only based on ease of assessment. The view that educators are not clear about their objectives and therefore should abandon peripheral or cloudy areas and concentrate on simple basic skills is appealing but may well be irresponsible. The most complex areas could well be the most valuable.

<sup>1</sup> Nash, R. & Agne, R. 'The Ethos of Accountability' Teachers College Record, Columbia University, Vol. 73, No.3, 1972, p.357.

In this section I have attempted to comment on the teacher's tasks in a very general sense. The specific task delineated for any individual would depend on a number of factors, and would be so varied that there would be little point in attempting to elaborate on it here. What is vital, however, is that the guidelines within which such task delineation is drawn up are appropriate and attainable. Perhaps the most difficult problem in this regard is to set up such specifications in such a way that the freedom which would seem to be necessary in order to give professional responsibility is neither limited nor denied.

SECTION IV

Summary

This dissertation was undertaken on the assumption that educators faced various problems in relation to responsibility. Some of these problems are connected directly to a lack of clarity surrounding term usage and concept reference while others are derived from practices which have developed from a lack of professional expertise at varying levels of the educational system. Some of the problems and their causes are obvious, while others are not. In some instances I have merely attempted to establish where problems occur, while in others I have suggested methods of overcoming them. To do this I have found it necessary to side-step some conceptual obscurities by suggesting ways of approaching meaning. Without adopting such a procedure it seemed difficult to reach a position where any practical suggestions relating to educational management could be offered. Where agreement on meaning is reached many of the conclusions tend to become matters of logical necessity. For example, to suggest that the educator should be given sufficient freedom to carry out certain moral responsibilities might also be to suggest that it is necessary for him to be a morally responsible person.

I will briefly summarize what I consider to be the most important issues as they have arisen throughout the investigation. It is accepted that the concept of responsibility has strong value implications and that those involved in education carry a heavy responsibility burden. The teacher should be a responsible person and he has a number of specific responsibilities. Unfortunately, the conceptual difficulties surrounding the terms 'responsibility' and 'education' have placed the teacher in a situation where he is not at all clear about the demands made of him and the obligations he has to his profession, to his employers, and to his students. Although it is accepted that teaching should be a profession and that the various responsibilities associated with it are important and necessary, it seems that the attempt to produce actual delineation and clarification of these responsibilities has been seriously neglected. The obvious question which arises is whether someone can

be held responsible for something which has not been established. Surely he cannot. This issue can be side-stepped by suggesting 'responsibility' is being used in such a loose or ambiguous sense that no one is really concerned whether obligations are adhered to or not. My main concern in relation to this type of usage is the fact that vital and perhaps necessary obligations are affected in such a way that the quality of education suffers.

In practice teachers are given and take responsibilities which are not only questionable from an educational point of view, but are often unrelated to their professional expertise. If we relate this to the Aristotelian view that responsibility requires freedom and specific knowledge, we find that although responsibility is assigned and accepted, we are faced with a degree of logical inconsistency. It seems that many 'educational responsibilities' must be questioned because (i) they may not logically relate to any established educational theory or philosophy and (ii) the teacher does not have the ability, the expertise or the freedom to carry them out. Rather than the term 'responsibility' being used deliberately in any new or stipulated way it seems that it is merely being used in ignorance. The blame for what could be regarded as irresponsible usage must rest on the shoulders of both those apportioning it and those accepting it. Can they be blamed if they are ignorant or are they 'culpably' ignorant?

This raises the basic philosophical dilemma of free-will and determinism. Although I suggest that it is necessary to avoid a 'hard determinist' stand for responsibility to have meaning, determinism does seem to prove a major stumbling block when one attempts to decide between 'culpable' ignorance and extenuating circumstance. To suggest that the matter can be tidied up by arguing that ignorance in educational matters should be regarded as 'culpable' if the person in question claims 'professional educator' status is merely to shift the problem. To hold teachers responsible for certain professional duties means that far more must be done to clarify the concept of education.



If we accept Peters<sup>1</sup> view of the concept, which maintains that the educator is responsible for passing on desirable skills and knowledge in a morally acceptable manner, there are still a number of questions to be answered. What is meant by terms such as 'desirable', 'knowledge', and 'morally acceptable'?

Unfortunately, a number of teachers and those involved in administration are not aware of the implications of such questions. For example, it is necessary for teachers to be well aware of the nature and source of the values and knowledge they are passing on. If they feel that they have a greater responsibility to the individual than to society, that which is passed on must be selected with this in mind. It would seem that a lack of awareness in this direction places the teacher in a situation where he is not able to satisfactorily assess his curriculum content in relation to his desired objectives.

Further work seems to be needed at two levels: one being the need to analyze and solve some of the underlying philosophical problems and the other being to ensure that the teacher and the administrator be provided with access to, and an appreciation of, the conclusions made in this regard.

Assuming that the educator is held to be responsible in a moral sense, it is essential that he be fully aware of exactly what such a responsibility entails. He would be expected to have the ability to assess the value of various ethical principles and to put them into some order of priority for use in his teaching. An awareness of the work done in this area by Hirst and Peters would be a valuable aid, as the idea of basing such a morality on a set of publicly defensible reasons would seem to correspond closely with the principles underlying current educational practice.

<sup>1</sup>Peters, R.S. Concept of Education, London, Oxford Uni. Press, 1973.

Many responsibility claims made in relation to people, groups, and institutions are vague and would seem to be of little practical value. However, the underlying philosophical issues they raise must be considered. References to such entities as self, mankind or God are often made in ignorance of the complex theoretical issues implied. The questions which must be asked are (i) what exactly is meant by such references, (ii) is it logically and technically possible to be responsible to such entities and (iii) how appropriate are such claims in relation to the educator's task. Such claims have varying effects on individuals but from a practical management point of view many such issues tend to be vague and obscure.

The same could be said of responsibilities to 'society', because this term carries with it its own conceptual difficulties. However, we do accept the notion that the society takes responsibility for the education of its members. The teacher becomes involved in a web of society structured institutional responsibilities many of which can conflict with what he sees as more rational-moral responsibilities to his students and to the profession. It is as possible for the educational institution to lose sight of basic educational objectives as it is possible for the teacher to lose sight of the management strategies necessary to keep the institution operable. Conflicts are probably inevitable but it seems they will only be solved if both parties, teachers and administrators, are made fully aware of the problems. Administrators must keep in touch with current changes in educational thinking and have the ability to rearrange the structure of the institution while the classroom teacher must have some knowledge and appreciation of administrative and management procedures. It would seem that this is unlikely to be provided by experience in the field alone and could be complemented by in-service theoretical study.

The educator's responsibilities to society are limited by the degree to which the society prepares him to carry out his professional task and by the degree of freedom it allows him.

Decisions regarding the limitations of the educator's rights and obligations within the society or community must be made, but whether they should be made by teacher, school, education department, government minister or the community itself is difficult to ascertain. Often no decision is made on who should make the decision leaving the educator in a dilemma. In practice the teacher may find that home visits aid progress in the classroom but how far in this direction can he be expected to go? Is the teacher expected to become a social worker and should he attempt to change community attitudes and values by work outside the educational institution? Again it seems that few wish to stipulate in this direction because there is a fear that professional freedom could be interfered with. Regardless of this there seem to be logical and physical limitations on the degree to which responsibilities can be taken in this direction. Most teachers who fulfil their rather demanding obligations to the students within the school structure would have little time to work outside the school and secondly they would be limited by their own professional expertise. In other words, few teachers are trained social workers and few are trained to teach adults. It seems that current trends to spread the educator's skills and abilities over wider areas both in relation to age groups and subject areas could prove to be detrimental to any real educational progress. Whether this could be regarded as irresponsible is difficult to say. Obviously many idealistic innovative trends either develop from a lack of understanding of the educational implications involved or from a degree of ignorance but whether we can say this is 'culpable' ignorance depends on many factors. If education is to be regarded as a profession and teachers are expected to have professional responsibilities, practices such as community involvement in the educational process should be looked at very carefully. The teacher who allows his professional freedom and initiative to be limited or taken over by enthusiastic but unskilled laymen also relinquishes his educational responsibilities. I am critical of such trends because the looseness and lack of clarity surrounding the educational ideals embraced tend to reveal an unfortunate and unsatisfactory degree of logical inconsistency.

Throughout the study I have spoken of the educator as a single entity. I have done this to emphasize moral responsibility issues. In practice many, if not most, educational decisions are made by groups. Although corporate decisions would seem to benefit from a wider knowledge source there is the problem of transferring moral responsibility to a group. The security of knowing that failure will only result in shared blame does, I believe, have a tendency to encourage a higher degree of rash and idealistic decision making. I believe this has happened in relation to educational decisions and although it might be regarded as minor in one sense, it does seem to be an underlying cause of many unsatisfactory administrative problems.

Responsibility problems of a more specific nature are evident within the management and administrative process. The content and appropriateness of directives passed from the education department to the school and to the teacher are a major source of concern. There is a lack of clarity surrounding school autonomy and particular problems seem evident in relation to the responsibility of the principal. Although it is frequently suggested that improved teacher preparation will improve the situation, it becomes obvious that improvement is needed at all levels of the hierarchical structure. The main hurdle seems to be one of convincing those fully involved with the practical day-to-day problems of educating children that improvement, particularly at a theoretical level, is necessary. With the increasing need for schools and teachers to account for their educational actions there should be no question about the value of improving assessment and evaluation techniques. It is also essential for administrators to realize that time and funds must be made available for these procedures to be carried out.

Finally, it is hoped that the points raised in this investigation provide those involved in educational management and administration with a greater insight into the responsibility problems facing the educator and that the seriousness of many of the implications might provide the incentive for more positive action to be taken in this regard.

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